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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VT](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE/VENEZUELA: CARDINAL'S HAT FOR UROSA MARKS VATICAN  
INTEREST

REF: (A) CARACAS 495, (B) 05 VATICAN 508, (C) 05 VATICAN 555, (D) 05 VATICAN 519, (E) VATICAN 023, (F) VATICAN 027, (G) VATICAN 034

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'affaires a.i.,  
EXEC, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1. (C) Summary. The rapid elevation to Cardinal of Archbishop Urosa is a mark of Holy See interest in Venezuela and Venezuelan Catholics. Not incidentally, it puts Urosa in a position to draw attention away from retired Cardinal Castillo Lara, whose scraps with the Chavez regime have not been favorably viewed here. End summary.

2. (C) Pope Benedict XVI named fifteen new members of the College of Cardinals on February 22 (ref g), among them Archbishop Jorge Liberato Urosa Savino of Caracas. As Post has reported, Urosa's eventual elevation was likely, though not automatic. The surprising factor was that the red hat came so quickly for Urosa after his November installation as archbishop. Urosa vaulted over several archbishops who had been in major archdioceses for longer. Further, with Vatican officials telling us to expect more frequent consistories from Pope Benedict than from his predecessor (perhaps yearly) there was no hurry to fit Urosa for his new cassock. The move clearly reflects the high level of Holy See interest in Venezuela - something that has been apparent in our conversation with top officials and in A/S Shannon's recent visit here.

3. (C) As archbishop of Caracas, Urosa was already in a position to take some of the limelight from retired Cardinal Castillo Lara, as ref (a) suggested. Now, in addition, Urosa's status as an active cardinal trumps that of his more vocal brother in red. Although we've heard some expressions of support for Castillo Lara's battles with President Chavez - and nearly universal agreement with the substance of his comments -- the Secretariat of State's Section for Relations with States (Foreign Ministry) has consistently told us that Castillo Lara's outspoken ways are not constructive. The Holy See, preferring a conciliatory approach to Chavez, sees Urosa as assertive without being overly aggressive. One of our best Vatican contacts on Venezuela confirmed to us that Urosa's elevation owes more to political realities than to his theological or pastoral abilities, while also emphasizing that it reflects the importance of the situation in Venezuela rather than a slap at Castillo Lara.

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